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LETTER DATED 18 JUNE 1992 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I wish to transmit herewith the text of the statement by Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq and head of the Iraqi delegation, to the "Earth Summit" held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which he delivered before the above-mentioned Conference on 9 June 1992.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the Security Council.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) Abd al-Amir AL-ANBARI
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement by the head of the Iraqi delegation, Mr. Tariq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister, at the Conference on Environment and Development, Brazil (3-14 June 1992)

Mr. President,

I should like, first, to express my great appreciation for the efforts which your Government has made in preparing for this great world Conference. I should like also to commend the relations of friendship and fruitful and equal cooperation that have existed between our countries for many years, as a good example of cooperation between independent developing countries; but that was before the comprehensive sanctions were imposed on Iraq.

This Conference is convened to deal with one of the most important questions facing the human race, namely, the question of the environment and the future of this planet and of the thousands of millions of human beings who live on it.

Large-scale preparations were made for this Conference, with the participation of many experts and sincere propagandists for tackling the problem of the environment and also representatives of States. We have witnessed and we continue to witness a sincere intention and strong will to adopt effective measures to protect our planet from the dangers to which it is exposed. However, the truth that became clear to all, before the convening of the Conference and during its deliberations, is that the influential States that bear the primary responsibility for the hazards of pollution from which our planet suffers, first and foremost, the United States, are the ones that are obstructing arrival at effective and sound solutions.

The military, political and economic domination exercised by the United States under cover of the so-called "new international order" is combined with domination over the situation of the environment of this planet. It directs matters in a twisted fashion and casts the responsibility on the small developing countries, at a time when the United States in particular and the rich industrialized States in general are shirking their responsibilities for the pollution of the environment and for the adoption of effective steps to save our planet from the looming dangers.

On this matter, as on other basic problems from which the world today is suffering, those States follow a course of double standards.

Mr. President,

Iraq is a country whose civilized life extends over several thousands of years. It was in Iraq that the first human civilization arose, and during those many centuries of human life and productivity of all kinds, the environment in Iraq remained generally sound. Nevertheless, our country has participated in all international activities aimed at tackling the problems of

pollution and has supported honest and effective proposals and measures to deal with it. However, the situation of the environment in our country changed greatly in 1991 and came to represent a vast ongoing danger to the life and future of our people.

The military operations, instigated and presided over by the United States, on the pretext of implementing Security Council resolution 687 (1991) have wrought large-scale destruction on our country, extending to all areas of human life. The bombs and missiles launched in the name of international legitimacy were aimed directly and deliberately at the civilian population in all parts of the country. They have destroyed our homes, struck mosques and churches and destroyed bridges, civilian factories and cultural centres. Not even antiquities and museums were safe from them. The evidence of the destruction is comprehensive and atrocious. The reports of United Nations missions and impartial observers have corroborated it, but I will focus particularly on the destruction that has had a direct impact on the environment in the ancient land between the two rivers.

From the first day of the military operations, oil installations were subjected to comprehensive bombardment, and, in addition to ports, petroleum pumping stations and loading centres, four large refineries were bombed, namely, Shu'aybah, Nasiriyah, Dawrah and Bayji, located in or on the outskirts of major cities. The Dawrah refinery is located on the Tigris river in the capital, Baghdad, and the Basra refinery is on the outskirts of the city of Basra. Then the bombing and destruction operations expanded to include production stations and large storage depots in the Rumaylah and Zubayr fields and then the production and refinery installations in Kirkuk, as well as pumping stations, transportation lines, petroleum product depots, gas pressure and water retention stations in the southern and northern Rumaylah fields.

The bombing was also deliberately and methodically aimed to hit every electric generator throughout the country.

The quantities of oil and petroleum derivatives burned, spilled on the ground or infiltrating water resources have been estimated at 30 million barrels, and the various chemical substances burned or leaked have been estimated at more than 1 million tons.

The targeting of power stations and oil installations, the two basic sources of energy in the country, has caused vast damage to the environment. Seventy per cent of the drinking water projects in Iraq have been halted either completely or partially, and this has deprived citizens of potable water. Seventy per cent of the water-treatment stations have halted operation, and in many cases industrial water-treatment units have been damaged as a result of the bombing of factories and oil installations, since a total of 12 units have ceased operation, while the capacity of 20 other units has declined. As a result, untreated sewage and industrial water has been disposed of in the rivers, and 2,701 swamp areas have been formed because of lack of sewage drainage and the rise in the groundwater level.

The bombing of power sources has had an extremely grave environmental impact. The pumping stations for the spigots that drain off salt water have ceased operation, and this has caused a rise in the fresh-water level so that it has flooded and impaired arable land, and large areas of agricultural land (estimated at 1,400,000 hectares) have ceased production. The bombing attacks were deliberately aimed at dams and irrigation systems. As a result, the agricultural area was reduced in the summer of 1991 by one half for the rice crop, for example, and livestock resources were reduced, while agricultural diseases spread as a result of a lack of pesticides and because the Iraqi authorities were barred from using civilian aircraft to combat agricultural epidemics.

The war machine dropped 180,000 tons of bombs and explosives, equivalent in destructive force to six of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The movement of machinery and the digging operations caused the destruction of the surface layer of the soil, while the vegetable cover that had formed over hundreds of years in the desert environment was exposed to elimination because of the military activity of the forces that invaded Iraq. This has become clear from the high level of dust and sandstorms in Baghdad and throughout central and southern Iraq. In May 1991, the level was five times that for the same month in 1990. This has had a highly detrimental effect on the environment and on human and animal life.

Perhaps even more dangerous than what we have mentioned above are the data contained in the report of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency concerning the use by coalition forces of anti-tank shells made of depleted uranium which contain chemical toxins and radioactive materials and present a threat of a human and environmental disaster on a vast scale. The tens of thousands of anti-tank shells made of depleted uranium were launched from United States and British aircraft and tanks against Iraqi vehicles, and the chemical toxins and radioactive wastes emitted by the remains of these shells are a long-term threat to the life of thousands of Iraqi inhabitants. The United States fired 5,000 depleted uranium shells at Iraqi vehicles, while United States aircraft dropped tens of thousands of such shells. The shells fired by the tanks alone may contain more than 50,000 pounds of depleted uranium, radioactive substances that expose half a million human beings to danger of death. This repugnant crime against humanity must be resolutely condemned by the international community.

The aggressive military operations launched against Iraq in the name of the Security Council has engendered a vast, complex and grave environmental problem that involves water, air and soil, as well as a severe shortage of food and medicaments.

Just imagine the situation of sick and wounded persons in hospitals without electricity and without medicaments and other essentials because of the sanctions.

In 1991, the number of people with communicable diseases increased many times over the figure for 1989. For example, the number of registered cases of infantile paralysis was 19 times as high, and the figure for typhoid 10 times the former figure. One thousand three hundred and seventeen cases of cholera were registered, whereas no cases were registered for 1989 and 1990.

What happened to Iraq at the hands of the aggressive coalition forces constitutes the gravest breach of international humanitarian law ever committed in the context of military operations allegedly based on international legitimacy. The credibility of international law and humanitarian law have become suspect, and this situation must not be met with silence.

The statistics that we have mentioned are not Iraqi Government statistics but facts and statistics contained in studies carried out by United Nations bodies and specialized agencies and independent bodies such as Harvard University.

This is the situation of the environment in Iraq. Definitive action to remove the dangers of disease and pollution in Iraq would be the lifting of the comprehensive sanctions imposed on our people. I do not wish to stir up political controversy in this august forum on the environment. However, the link between the sanctions and the situation of the environment in Iraq is unambiguous. It has been affirmed by the reports of the United Nations itself. I do not wish to enter into the details of the position of the Security Council on this matter. This is not the appropriate place. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that, regardless of the divergent estimates of what has been achieved through the resolutions imposed against Iraq, the progress achieved so far has been great. Iraq has acted responsibly and positively vis-à-vis the Security Council resolutions, and it is prepared to continue cooperation with the Council in carrying out the obligations imposed on it under Security Council resolution 687 (1991) and other resolutions, provided that the Council respects the sovereignty of Iraq as an independent country, respects its basic legitimate interests and refrains from intervening in its internal affairs. However, the Security Council under the influence of a limited number of its members, first and foremost, the United States, and for political reasons unrelated to the resolutions of the Security Council itself, has not taken any step so far to lift the iniquitous comprehensive sanctions on our people in order to enable it to continue its life and deal with the dangerously increasing problems of the environment and health that have arisen from the military operations and the sanctions. One and a half years have elapsed since the end of the military operations and the commencement of Iraq's responsible and continuous implementation of the resolutions imposed on it. At a meeting in March, we explained to the Security Council, with documents and proofs, the extent to which the Council's resolutions have been implemented, but the Council's position has not changed and the sanctions are still imposed on Iraq.

The Council is called upon to take serious steps to lift the sanctions and not to be a political tool for achieving objectives that are contrary to

the principles of the Charter. The international community is called upon to support this legitimate demand.

This is our message to the Conference. We hope that it will find the desired echo along the lines that will achieve justice and accord with the humanitarian goals of this Conference.

God is great.